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SUBJECT: CAR NATIONAL DIALOGUE - OPENING DAY OBSERVATIONS, ANALYSIS

REF: BANGUI 234

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Central African Republic's 'Inclusive Political Dialogue' began under the gavel of President Francois Bozize and in the presence of Gabonese President Bongo, UN Special Representative Francois Fall, and former Burundian President and chosen Dialogue Mediator Pierre Buyoya. The proceedings were covered live on television and radio. All of the armed rebel groups pledged to renounce the use of force. The high points of the day were a long rambling and ultimately ambiguous speech by former President Ange-Felix Patasse and a pair of speeches by President Bozize; conciliatory in French and more aggressive in Sango. Interestingly, none of the civil society or political opposition leaders was allowed to speak. It is still very early in the process, but if this really represents the end of armed conflict in the CAR, then it is a tremendous step forward. END SUMMARY

SPEECHES

12. (SBU) Despite the selection of former Burundian President Pierre Buyoya as mediator of the Dialogue, President Bozize, not Buyoya, held the gavel on opening day and Buyoya was reduced to the role of only one of many speakers.

- United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon's special representative, Ambassador Francois Fall was the first to speak, but only after being physically prevented by CAR Presidential Protocol from crossing the stage and being obliged to descend to the floor before passing in front of President Bozize to remount to the speaker's podium on the other side. Fall read an encouraging opening message from UNSYG Moon and returned to his seat.

- Next to speak were the various armed groups, the UFDR, the MLCJ, and the APRD, each of whom explicitly addressed President Bozize as 'head of state.' This may, however, be more a matter of local protocol than a formal acknowledgement of Bozize's political legitimacy. They each went on to explicitly reject

violence, several using the same expression, 'bury the hatchet of war.'

- Next to speak was former head of state Ange-Felix Patasse who spoke in his characteristic, slow, emphatic style. He delivered an hour-long, wide ranging speech which praised his 'dear brother' Bozize, gave thanks to the 'God of Exiles,' praised the 'great hero of the Libyan Revolution,' cited U.S. President-elect Obama as an inspiration for all Africans, declared to applause that the Dialogue was not a 'petit bourgeois' exercise, and, to even more applause, that it was not just about positions in the government. He went on to swear, in front of the international community and the Central African People, that he was back and at their service.

13. (SBU) President Bozize followed with remarks in both French and Sango. His comments in French were anodyne and conciliatory, stressing that the elections of 2005 existed, the CAR state existed, the constitution existed, the national assembly existed, the presidential majority existed and that none of these institutions could be called into question. He then spoke extensively in Sango, taking a very different tone in which he expressed doubts about the results the inclusive political dialogue could achieve. He reminded the audience of the various similar political dialogues and fora held in this country starting with the national seminar organized in 1980 after the collapse of Emperor Bokassa. After 28 years of dialogue, where are we? President Bozize asked. President Bozize's speech focused on the need for this inclusive political dialogue to be conducted within established institutions. Those familiar with recent Central African political developments noted that President Bozize resisted for a long time the idea of an inclusive political dialogue before being finally forced to

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accept it under the combined pressure of the international community and the rebel groups. President Bozize's suspicions were evident in the tone and content of his remarks in Sango, which were far from the conciliatory words of the French version.

- Finally, President Bongo spoke, taking an extremely familiar, avuncular style and stressing that the Central Africans had to work things out for themselves.

OBSERVATIONS:

14. (SBU) Among the numerous speeches given at the opening ceremony of the Inclusive Political Dialogue, three were particularly awaited. They were Patasse's, Demafouth's and Bozize's, given their past conflict and current tense relationship. President Bozize has long opposed Patasse's and Demafouth's participation in the inclusive political dialogue, relenting only recently. No one else, not civil society, the political opposition (UFPV), or the presidential majority, was allowed to speak; the day was clearly all about the armed groups, Patasse, Bozize, and, by implication, former president Kolingba.

15. (SBU) After asking for forgiveness from the populations affected by the military operations of APRD, Jean Jacques Demafouth declared that the current inclusive political dialogue was necessary to end the suffering of the population ('innocents') before suggesting that this forum produce two major decisions. First of all, he demanded that a serious audit take place of the country's economic management, particularly the management of the parastatal companies and the forestry and mining sectors. Secondly, the inclusive political dialogue's resolutions should include the adoption of a common management program for the country's development. NOTE: This approach is directly connected to the UFPV's declaration issued the day before the opening ceremony. UFPV members believe also that the inclusive political dialogue should result in clear objectives with precise strategy to deal with numerous political, economical and social problems the country is facing. END NOTE

¶16. (SBU) Contrary to what many observers expected, Patasse's speech was consensual. However, he lamented not having had a separate preliminary meeting between Bozize, former President Andre Kolingba (who stayed in Paris due to ill health), and himself. Patasse felt that this tripartite meeting was necessary to determine the causes of the military crisis, and thus plan for their resolution. During his speech Patasse recognized that each of them as president or former president has a degree of responsibility for the current crisis. Addressing President Bozize, Patasse said that he was sincere and requested that Bozize recognize his own errors before the nation. He concluded that the Inclusive Political Dialogue should not be a trial or an occasion for dividing pieces of the pie.

¶17. (SBU) It seems clear that much is happening behind the scenes.

-- Bozize and Bongo, at least, kept the group waiting for two hours between the time of Bongo's arrival at the airport and their arrival on the stage. The assumption is that they held a private meeting.

-- At least one armed group and Patasse both quoted Ecclesiastes - 'a time for war, a time for peace,' leading to questions of coordination between the parties before the Dialogue.

-- Rumors abound that Bongo warned Demafouth and Patasse to behave. There was also lots of discussion of alleged suitcases of money provided by the Gabonese. The amount of the Gabonese government's public contribution to the Dialogue elicited gasps

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from the crowd when mentioned.

-- There were rumors today that the political opposition (UFVN) were boycotting the session as they had not been allowed to speak. (Although they deny it, the UFN has made no secret of their desire to use the Dialogue as a vehicle to remove President Bozize before 2010.)

¶18. (SBU) It is very early in the process to reach any conclusions; still, if the Dialogue can really end the armed rebellion on the opening day, it could represent real progress.
COOK ##